

Cheap Print and Street Literature of the Long Eighteenth Century

Edited by
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David Atkinson and Steve Roud (eds), *Cheap Print and Street Literature of the Long Eighteenth Century*. Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2023,
<https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0347>

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ISBN Paperback: 978-1-80511-039-2

ISBN Hardback: 978-1-80511-040-8

ISBN Digital (PDF): 978-1-80511-041-5

ISBN Digital ebook (EPUB): 978-1-80511-042-2

ISBN XML: 978-1-80511-044-6

ISBN HTML: 978-1-80511-045-3

DOI: 10.11647/OBP.0347

Cover image: 'Jack on a cruise', pewter print. British Museum 2011.7084.20,
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jack_on_a_cruise_\(BM_2011,7084.20\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jack_on_a_cruise_(BM_2011,7084.20).jpg)
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II. Street Literature and Cheap Fiction

David Atkinson

Booksellers specializing in street literature had been publishing prose fiction in the form of legendary, historical, and comic tales — tales like *Jane Shore*, *Fair Rosamond*, *Guy of Warwick*, *Robin Hood*, *Valentine and Orson*, *Doctor Faustus* — since the sixteenth century and they continued to do so into the early nineteenth century. Sometimes called ‘chapbook histories’, they could be bought and sold directly from the printers, from modest retail premises, or from itinerant pedlars and hawkers. These were the same booksellers who published narrative ballads, lyric songs, and song collections, and things like jest books, riddles, prophecies, and prognostications, the lives of criminals and other notable characters, accounts of natural disasters and other topical occurrences, playbooks, and some religious tracts and sermons.

Most importantly, these were printed works that were cheaply printed and sold. Of course, it is difficult to know what actually counted as cheap for the potential purchaser in the street. Although it is frequently impossible to know the exact retail price of any particular item, which in any case might have varied, it is widely understood that things like ballads and small chapbooks were usually priced at around $\frac{1}{2}d.$ or $1d.$ Topical pamphlets, playbooks, and instructional titles might sell for $3d.$, $4d.$, or $6d.$ Works of greater extent (say, more than a hundred pages, octavo or duodecimo) cost as much as $1s.$, placing them beyond what would intuitively count as cheap. These sorts of sums seem to have remained fairly stable from the late seventeenth century to the end of the

eighteenth, even while the prices of new books at the more fashionable end of the market were rising steadily from the mid-century.¹

The later eighteenth century was also a period of general price inflation, with considerable fluctuations during the Napoleonic period, so a degree of price stability should mean that cheap literature became relatively more affordable as the century wore on. The cost of living debate remains contentious even among economic historians, however, and with so many potential variables — location, occupation, age, gender, family size, to name but a few — it will never be possible to settle on anything more than a rule of thumb to determine what qualified as cheap.² One estimate is that cheap meant 6*d.* or less when a labourer earned around 10*s.* per week at the end of the eighteenth century.³ There is considerable evidence for modest publications priced at up to 6*d.* over a long period of time, and certain longer works (domestic and instructional titles, for example) priced at 1*s.* might also have been within the reach of some households, especially later in the century.⁴

Some book historians have depicted a decline in the old chapbook tales as a rather sudden event that occurred towards the end of the eighteenth century, which can be connected with industrialization and urbanization, the commercialization of culture, and, in William St Clair's view, with the post-1774 change in the copyright regime which

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- 1 For rising prices, Richard D. Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800–1900*, 2nd edn (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1998 [1957]), pp. 51–52; John Feather, 'The British Book Market, 1600–1800', in *A Companion to the History of the Book*, ed. Simon Eliot and Jonathan Rose (Malden, MA, and Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007), pp. 232–46 (pp. 244–45); James Raven, 'The Book as a Commodity', in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, vol. 5, 1695–1830, ed. Michael F. Suarez, SJ, and Michael L. Turner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 85–117 (pp. 96–98); William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 193–96.
 - 2 In a significant article, Robert D. Hume, 'The Value of Money in Eighteenth-Century England: Incomes, Prices, Buying Power — and Some Problems in Cultural Economics', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 77 (2015), 373–416, specifically addresses the economics of culture.
 - 3 Gary Kelly, 'Sixpenny State? Cheap Print and Cultural-Political Citizenship in the Onset of Modernity', *Lumen: Selected Proceedings from the Canadian Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies / Travaux choisis de la Société canadienne d'étude du dix-huitième siècle*, 36 (2017), 37–61 (esp. pp. 38–40) <https://doi.org/10.7202/1037853ar>. See also St Clair, *Reading Nation*, pp. 195–96.
 - 4 Hume, 'Value of Money', concurs on the affordability of print up to 6*d.*, even while emphasizing that for much of the population that was still a not inconsiderable sum.

brought in a flood of cheap reprints of canonical literature.⁵ One reason for this perspective is the tendency to think of eighteenth-century fiction in terms of the major novelists, whose works were expensive and most readily accessed by readers of the middling sort through circulating libraries.⁶ For much of the century, canonical fiction was available cheaply only in the form of a very restricted range of abridgements, of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, *Robinson Crusoe*, *Moll Flanders*, and to a lesser extent *Tom Jones* and *Gulliver's Travels*.⁷

After the end of the century, or perhaps during the 1790s, according to the standard accounts, a new kind of cheap fiction emerged, aimed at working-class readers and priced at 6d. to 1s.⁸ These were short novels (novellas or novelettes) in a format similar to the old chapbook histories, typically octavos or duodecimos in the region of thirty-six to sixty-four pages (but sometimes any one volume might contain more than one story). The stories they told were related to, and sometimes adapted from, contemporary book-length gothic, sentimental, and historical fiction. The printed books themselves would sometimes come with an engraved and possibly hand-coloured frontispiece and coloured paper wrappers (possibly more frequently than is immediately apparent from copies that have survived).

There is little doubt that the market for cheap fiction was indeed expanding at the end of the century. However, the appearance of modernity is, in certain respects, superficial. Material improvements

5 Victor E. Neuburg, *Popular Literature: A History and Guide, from the Beginning of Printing to the Year 1897* (London: Woburn Press, 1977), pp. 121–22; St Clair, *Reading Nation*, pp. 348–50.

6 Altick, *English Common Reader*, p. 50; Feather, 'British Book Market', p. 245; Michael F. Suarez, SJ, 'Business of Fiction: Novel Publishing, 1695–1774', in *The Oxford Handbook of the Eighteenth-Century Novel*, ed. J. A. Downie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 22–38 (pp. 35–36).

7 Pat Rogers, *Literature and Popular Culture in Eighteenth Century England* (Brighton: Harvester Press; Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble, 1985), pp. 162–67. For *Robinson Crusoe* (probably the most popular of all these titles), see Andrew O'Malley, 'Poaching on Crusoe's Island: Popular Reading and Chapbook Editions of Robinson Crusoe', *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 35.2 (2011), 18–38; Jordan Howell, 'Eighteenth-Century Abridgements of Robinson Crusoe', *The Library*, 7th ser., 15 (2014), 292–343.

8 Gary Kelly, 'Fiction and the Working Classes', in *The Cambridge Companion to Fiction in the Romantic Period*, ed. Richard Maxwell and Katie Trumpener (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 207–33 (p. 218); Gary Kelly, 'The Popular Novel, 1790–1820', in *The Oxford Handbook of the Eighteenth-Century Novel*, ed. J. A. Downie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 505–20 (esp. pp. 513–14).

in the production of small books reflected wider technological and trade developments, including the coming of the iron hand-press, the growth of a distinct market for children's literature, and the adoption of stereotyping. Nevertheless, as Gary Kelly has argued, the new short novels demonstrate marked continuities with the old chapbook tales — fast-paced and incident-packed narrative, generalized settings, stylized language, passages of hyperbole and moralizing, anonymity of authorship, and uniformity of physical appearance.⁹ Some of the same booksellers who published short fiction also continued to publish the old chapbook tales into the early decades of the nineteenth century.¹⁰ Conversely, as early as the mid-century, a small number of cheap fiction titles more typical of the century's end had started to appear from booksellers who otherwise specialized in street literature: the likes of Thomas and Elizabeth Bailey, Charles Sympson and J. Miller, and Thomas Sabine and Son. The role in the growing market for cheap fiction of booksellers who also specialized in street literature provides the core of this chapter.

Early amatory fiction

A starting point for the cheap fiction of the mid-century can be identified in the amatory fiction of Aphra Behn (1640?–89), Delarivier Manley (c.1670–1724), and Eliza Haywood (1693?–1756). Without trying to define a genre (and this chapter certainly does not purport to be a history of the novel), amatory fiction can be described as a kind of erotic fiction, written by professional or semi-professional women authors, from a specifically female perspective, which pays voyeuristic attention to the combined pleasures and ravages of seduction.¹¹ To these characteristics should be added the idea — in principle, if not necessarily in practice — of a predominantly female readership, and the precedents to be found in French amatory fiction, which was the source of some of the stories that found their way into the cheap English novels.¹²

9 Kelly, 'Fiction and the Working Classes', pp. 218–20.

10 Kelly, 'Fiction and the Working Classes', pp. 220–21.

11 Ros Ballaster, *Seductive Forms: Women's Amatory Fiction from 1684 to 1740* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), esp. pp. 32–35.

12 Ballaster, *Seductive Forms*, pp. 35–66.

Lennard Davis draws an important connection between this early amatory fiction and forms of street literature, arguing that writers of ballads and printed news habitually presented fiction as moral truth, and that by the same token novelists like Behn, Manley, and Haywood could relieve themselves of the restriction of depicting only events that were probable by asserting that their narratives were ‘true’.¹³ Behn, for example, writes in her short novel *The Fair Jilt*: ‘I do not pretend here to entertain you with a feign’d Story, or any thing piec’d together with *Romantick Accidents*; but every Circumstance, to a Tittle, is Truth.’¹⁴ The novelist’s claim not to be writing fiction is precisely an example of what Davis calls the ‘news/novels discourse’, which characteristically blurs the boundaries between truth and fiction in news ballads and topical chapbooks.¹⁵

In a further extension of the ‘news/novels discourse’, some of these early novels employ the techniques of the ‘secret history’, a genre of oppositional propaganda intended to expose matters of public and political scandal under the guise of fiction (a kind of *roman à clef*).¹⁶ Haywood’s *The City Jilt*, for example, is perhaps a veiled account of the Tory printer and alderman John Barber, who printed most of Manley’s works.¹⁷ At the same time, ‘secret history’ became a familiar convention for the blurring of the distinction between fact and fiction — the term appears repeatedly in the titles of cheap novels, regardless of whether they were supposed to carry any disguised reference to current affairs. Similarly, it is not always easy for the modern researcher to distinguish between fictional and non-fictional lives. At least the many chapbook lives of criminals from the period purport to relate to real people.¹⁸ Some

13 Lennard Davis, *Factual Fictions: The Origins of the English Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), pp. 102–22 (esp. pp. 112–13); cf. Ballaster, *Seductive Forms*, p. 53.

14 A[phra] Behn, *The Fair Jilt; or, The History of Prince Tarquin and Miranda* (London: printed by R. Holt; for Will. Canning, at his shop in the Temple Cloysters, 1688), p. 7 [ESTC R3666].

15 Davis, *Factual Fictions*, pp. 51–56, 108.

16 Eve Tavor Bannet, ‘“Secret History”’; or, Talebearing Inside and Outside the Secretorie’, *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 68 (2005), 375–96; Rachel Carnell, ‘Eliza Haywood and the Narratological Tropes of Secret History’, *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, 14.4 (2014), 101–21.

17 Carnell, ‘Eliza Haywood’, pp. 112–13.

18 Philip Rawlings, *Drunks, Whores and Idle Apprentices: Criminal Biographies of the Eighteenth Century* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), esp. pp. 4–9.

of the other stories that involve criminality, aristocratic elopements, and the like (but with little in the way of verifiable circumstantial detail) may or may not concern actual historical personages. So it is already difficult to know whether we are dealing with fiction or with non-fiction that adheres to the conventions of fiction.

The Fair Jilt was first published in 1688, and then more than once as part of Aphra Behn's collected works, before it was reprinted, with some abridgement, by Sympson and Miller, priced at 3*d.*¹⁹ Haywood's short novels *The City Jilt* and *The Distress'd Orphan* cost 1*s.* when they were first published by James Roberts in 1726,²⁰ but were later reprinted by the Bailey and Sabine firms, priced around 6*d.* (perhaps less in the case of Bailey). Another of her short novels, *The City Widow*, cost only 6*d.* when James Roberts published it in 1729, but it is not known to have been reprinted later in the century.²¹

There were a number of booksellers at the cheaper end of the trade around the mid-century who mostly published other kinds of works, but would just occasionally (although it is not inconceivable that more titles have not survived) issue cheap fiction of various kinds. *The Secret History of Betty Ireland*, for example — a racy affair of forty-eight pages octavo encompassing marriage, prostitution, incest, and shoplifting — was published by James Read, and then by his widow Mary Read, in Whitefriars, Fleet Street, probably in the 1740s.²² The Read firm's other publications included topical pamphlets and criminals' lives.

Later editions of *Betty Ireland* were published by John Lever at an address in Little Moorgate, next to London Wall.²³ Plomer describes Lever as a 'publisher of some curious literature', which included topical

19 Mary Ann O'Donnell, *Aphra Behn: An Annotated Bibliography of Primary and Secondary Sources*, 2nd edn (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 116–19, 146–65.

20 *Daily Journal*, 24 June 1726, p. 2; *Daily Post*, 24 June 1726, p. 2.

21 *The City Widow; or, Love in a Butt, a Novel* (London: printed for J. Roberts, in Warwick Lane; and sold by the booksellers and pamphlet shops of London and Westminster, 1729), price 6*d.* [ESTC N4973].

22 *The Secret History of Betty Ireland* (London: printed for, and sold by J. Read, in Whitefryars, Fleet Street) [ESTC N22255]; *The Secret History of Betty Ireland*, 2nd edn (London: printed for, and sold by M. Read, in Whitefryars, Fleet Street) [ESTC N22256].

23 *The Secret History of Betty Ireland*, 6th edn (London: printed for John Lever, at Little Moorgate, next London Wall, near Moorfields), price 6*d.* [ESTC T109761]. Lever also issued a seventh edition [ESTC N36600] and a ninth edition [ESTC T179873], but there is no record of an eighth.

pamphlets, criminals' lives, jest books, and instructional works, at prices ranging from 6*d.* upwards.²⁴ Printed lists of books sold by John Lever include the sixth and seventh editions in 1764, and the ninth in 1789, the price remaining fixed at 6*d.*²⁵ On the title page are verses that invite comparison between Betty Ireland and Moll Flanders, and the story certainly fits into that mould of picaresque adventure.

In 1765, Lever also published *The Husband Forced to Be Jealous* — 'The Secret History of Several Noble Persons; a Very Entertaining History, and Founded on Real Facts, and Not the Result of an Inventive Fancy, as Many Books Are', as the sub-title has it — which was a slightly longer work, at sixty-two pages octavo, priced at 1*s.*²⁶ This was an English version of a French novel attributed to either Madame de Villedieu (1640–83) or Jean Donneau de Visé (1638–1710), which had previously been published in translation in 1668. According to a list of books printed for John Lever, *The Husband Forced to Be Jealous* was still in print in 1789, and the price was still 1*s.*²⁷

Thomas and Elizabeth Bailey (1740s–1776)

Much more central to the mid-century market in cheap fiction, though, was the firm founded in Leadenhall Street by Thomas Bailey, which has been studied in detail by Nathan Garvey.²⁸ Bailey became free of the Stationers' Company in 1741. Different imprints identify the firm's premises in Leadenhall Street as the Ship and Crown, Bailey's Printing Office, and No. 110, Leadenhall Street. After Thomas Bailey's death in 1764, he was succeeded by his widow Elizabeth, and then by his son, also Thomas, who became free of the Stationers' Company in 1767.²⁹ By late 1776, the firm had moved from Leadenhall Street to Star Alley, and

24 Plomer, *Dictionary, 1726 to 1775*, pp. 154–55 (ESTC extends Plomer's dates for Lever).

25 Bookseller's lists in ESTC T114106, T152266, T139835.

26 *The Husband Forced to Be Jealous; or, The Good Fortune of those Women that Have Jealous Husbands*, 2nd edn (London: printed for John Lever, bookseller, stationer, and print-seller, at Little Moorgate, next to London Wall, near Moorfields, 1765), price 1*s.* [ESTC T99448].

27 Bookseller's list in ESTC T147667.

28 Nathan Garvey, 'A Dynasty on the Margins of the Trade: The Bailey Family of Printers, ca. 1740–1840, Part 1', *Script & Print*, 32.3 (2008), 144–62.

29 Garvey, 'Dynasty on the Margins of the Trade', pp. 156–58.

Garvey believes that at this period Thomas Bailey (the younger) may have been less involved in publishing and more in printing for others, including his brother William.³⁰ The firm's output from Leadenhall Street comprises almost exclusively lives of criminals, jest books, religious and instructional titles, and what Garvey describes as 'mildly salacious, chapbook-length amatory narratives'.³¹ In line with others at this end of the trade, the firm's imprints also advertised patent medicines and jobbing printing for things like tradesmen's bills.³²

Garvey characterizes the majority of Bailey's publications as reprints and/or abridgements of popular or topical works.³³ In some cases this is evidently true. Examples include the captivity narrative of George (*recte* Adam) Elliot from 1682; the account of Captain John Lancey, executed in 1754, derived from the Ordinary of Newgate's account published in that year; the history of the pirate Tulagee Angria, an abridgement of an account published in 1756; the story of the putative kidnapping of Elizabeth Canning, advertised by another bookseller in 1754; the abridged 'memoirs' of the courtesan Kitty Fisher, which were published in two volumes in 1759; and the life of William Andrew Horne, executed in Nottingham in December 1759, which was published by Samuel Cresswell in Nottingham in the same year. In other instances, such as the lives of Thomas Mitchell (the 'deaf and dumb' impostor), Mary Mussen (executed 1757), and Mary Edmon(d)son (executed 1759), or the loss of the East Indiaman the *Doddington* in 1755, it is less certain whether Bailey was dependent on earlier editions from other booksellers.

When it comes to Bailey's amatory narratives, it is frequently difficult (*pace* Garvey) to pin down exactly what was an original title and what was a reprint, altered or otherwise — or, again, what was fiction and what was not. Few of the firm's imprints include a date, and they made considerable use of generic imprints, so it is difficult to be confident to which period they belong. The Leadenhall Street address does, however, allow some three dozen cheap fiction titles to be ascribed to the period between the 1740s and 1776. A few of the titles have a Mrs Bailey imprint

30 Garvey, 'Dynasty on the Margins of the Trade', p. 160.

31 Garvey, 'Dynasty on the Margins of the Trade', p. 148.

32 Garvey, 'Dynasty on the Margins of the Trade', pp. 153–56.

33 Garvey, 'Dynasty on the Margins of the Trade', pp. 149–51.

which can be narrowed down further to the period c.1764–67, and all of the extant Mrs Bailey titles belong to the genre of short fiction.

Most of the short fiction was published anonymously, the exception to prove the rule being three short novels by Charlotte Charke (1713–60), *The History of Charley and Patty*, *The Lover's Treat*, and *The Mercer*. Charke's biographer believes that she probably had her short fiction titles cheaply printed by Bailey and then peddled them to retail booksellers herself, although there does not seem to be any hard evidence to that effect.³⁴ Some further attributions can be made, which shed some light on the practice of reprinting earlier titles. Eliza Haywood's *The City Jilt* and *The Distress'd Orphan* were published by James Roberts in 1726; *The Batchelor Keeper* by Francis Atterbury (1663–1732) was included in a collection of *Atterburyana* from 1727 and subsequently published by Bailey; *The Lucky Misfortune* (which was printed with *The Female Porter of Shoreditch* but no longer extant because the surviving copy is imperfect) was probably a version of the story of the same title in *Twelve Delightful Novels* printed by Thomas Norris in 1719. One of the few longer works issued by the Bailey firm, *Belinda; or, Happiness the Reward of Constancy* was an altered reprint of Penelope Aubin's novel *The Life of Madam de Beaumont*, first published in 1721. *The True History of Henrietta de Bellgrave* was printed in *The Lady's Drawing Room* in 1744 (second edition, 1748).³⁵ This was a collection comprising several tales ostensibly recounted by a group of friends over a period of six days and strung together within a loose narrative framework.³⁶ Another of the *Lady's Drawing Room* stories is that of Rodomond and Zoa, the beautiful daughter of Henrietta de Bellgrave.³⁷ Bailey's is the earliest surviving cheap edition of *Henrietta de*

34 Kathryn Shevelov, *Charlotte* (London: Bloomsbury, 2005), pp. 366–67.

35 'The True History of Henrietta de Bellgrave', in *The Lady's Drawing Room, being a Faithfull Picture of the Great World, in which the Various Humours of Both Sexes Are Display'd, Drawn from the Life, and Interspers'd with Entertaining and Affecting Novels* (London: printed and sold by M. Cooper, in Paternoster Row; and A. Dodd, near Essex Street, in the Strand, 1744), pp. 101–74 [ESTC T80582]. *The Lady's Drawing Room* sold for 3s. (*Daily Post*, 9 February 1745, p. 3).

36 The framework trope is found in Mary Hearne's *The Lover's Week* (1718) and Eliza Haywood's translation *La Belle Assemblée* (1724–34), either of which could have been a precedent for *The Lady's Drawing Room*.

37 'The History of Rodomond and the Beautiful Indian', in *The Lady's Drawing Room*, pp. 13–36.

Bellgrave, but *Zoa and Rodomond* is not known to have been printed on its own before the 1790s.³⁸

There are also some titles derived from French novels. Both *The Invisible Mistress* and *The Judge in his Own Cause* were translations of short novels by Paul Scarron (1610–60), published in English from 1665 onwards. *The Love, Joy, and Distress of the Beautiful and Virtuous Miss Fanny Adams* was an abridged version of the English translation of *Fanni; ou, L'heureux repentir* by François-Thomas-Marie de Baculard d'Arnaud (1718–1805), published by T. Becket and P. A. de Hondt as *Fanny; or, The Happy Repentance* in 1766. Other cheap editions were published by William Nevett (Liverpool, 1767), T. Holliwell and J. Berry (Birmingham, 1769), and R. Sarjeant (Wolverhampton, 1769), under the title *Injured Innocence; or, Virtue in Distress* — 'Injured Innocence' being a phrase found in the title of more than one different story and apparently specifically intended to appeal to the sentimental taste of the 1760s.³⁹ These were booksellers who are not otherwise known to have been particularly associated with the cheap fiction trade.⁴⁰ The title was later issued by (among others) Robert Turner in 1777, a London bookseller who made something of a speciality of criminal lives, Bart. Corcoran in Dublin in 1780, and Clements, Sadler, and Eves in London in the 1790s (see below). These were all cheap, chapbook-like editions priced at 4*d.* or 6*d.*

For the remainder of the Bailey short fiction, ESTC records no ready parallels; they might have been original narratives printed for and sold by the Bailey firm, although one must be cautious because titles could change and stories first published in magazines or in other French

38 The ascription of *Henrietta de Bellgrave* to the period before 1776 is based on the Bailey's Printing Office, Leadenhall Street address (Garvey, 'Dynasty on the Margins of the Trade', p. 157). See also Madeleine Blondel, 'Eighteenth-Century Novels Transformed: Pirates and Publishers', *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 72 (1978), 527–41 (p. 532). Less convincingly, E. W. Pitcher, 'Pirates and Publishers Reconsidered: A Response to Madel[e]ine Blondel', *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 75 (1981), 75–81 (p. 78), favours a date around the beginning of the nineteenth century and either S. Bailey or J. Bailey (neither of whom is known to have been in Leadenhall Street, although there was a W. Bailey there in the 1780s).

39 Blondel, 'Eighteenth-Century Novels Transformed', p. 539.

40 Nevett was quite a prolific general printer; Holliwell and Berry are known only from this title, although Holliwell alone is associated with a few religious titles; Serjeant is otherwise unknown. (The *Virtue in Distress* published by Mrs Bailey is a different story altogether.)

sources may not have been identified. If the claim about Charlotte Charke employing Bailey as a printer for works that she herself then distributed is correct, then the same model could have worked for other authors. While the firm's corpus of short fiction does include several reprints, in the present state of knowledge it cannot safely be characterized as made up mostly of reprints.

The Bailey cheap fiction titles are typically octavos or duodecimos of around thirty-two pages, occasionally more. *Henrietta de Bellgrave* runs to eighty-two pages duodecimo, and the largest volume (aside from the Penelope Aubin novel) is one called *The Variety*, which brings together ten short novels in a duodecimo of eighty-six pages. There are no prices printed on the title pages, but a few of the firm's other publications offer points of comparison. An account of the execution of Captain John Lancey (twenty-four pages duodecimo) and the story of Elizabeth Canning (thirty-six pages octavo) were both priced at 3*d.*⁴¹ A tract called *The Plain Path-way to Heaven* (eighteen pages quarto, printed for the author) was available at £1 per hundred, making one copy just under 2½*d.* wholesale (perhaps sold at 3*d.* or 4*d.* retail).⁴² The Penelope Aubin novel (154 pages duodecimo) cost 1*s.* The cost of paper would have meant that length was a major determinant of price, so it is a reasonable inference that the short fiction would have been priced in the 3*d.* to 6*d.* range.

Charles Sympson and J. Miller (1750s–1780s)

The Bailey firm did not publish ballads or very much in the way of the typical chapbook stories, apart from a couple of jest books, but the criminals' lives and other topical titles were typical of the street literature trade. Charles Sympson, on the other hand, specialized in ballads and chapbooks and was second only in importance in the capital to the

41 *The Cruel Relation; or, Decoy'd Captain* (London: printed by T. Bailey, in Leadenhall Street, where tradesmen's bills are printed neat and reasonable), price 3*d.* [ESTC T192252]; *The Chronicle of the Canningites and Gipseyyites* (London: sold by T. Bailey, in Leadenhall Street; where bills are neatly printed off copper-plates and at the letter-press with expedition and at the most reasonable rates), price 3*d.* [ESTC N15018].

42 *The Plain Path-way to Heaven; or, A Sure Guide to Eternity, in Fifteen Excellent Rules* (London: printed for the author; and sold by T. Bailey, printer, in Leadenhall Street) [ESTC T62487] ('Those Charitable Persons who buys [*sic*] a quantity to give away to their poor Neighbours, shall have them after the Rate of 20*s.* one Hundred').

Dacey/Marshall firm in Bow Churchyard and Aldermary Churchyard.⁴³ In the early 1750s, Sympson was located at an address in Chancery Lane, from where he issued works of history and theology as well as topical pamphlets, frequently in collaboration with other booksellers, but from the late 1750s until his death in 1784 he was located in Stonecutter Street, near the Fleet Market. Here, besides the ballads and chapbooks, he printed criminals' lives, a few more substantial works — including unabridged editions of *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana* — and some short fiction. Imprints indicate that he, too, undertook jobbing printing for things such as shopkeepers' bills, and there are also some surviving trade cards printed by Sympson.

There are fewer surviving cheap fiction titles than there are for the Bailey firm, which was in business at much the same time. Like the Baileys' titles, Sympson's included reprints. In 1757, for example, an advertisement in the *Public Advertiser* announced the publication of *The Amorous Dutchess; or, The Lucky Gamester* (price 1s.), *The Fortunate Beauty* (price 1s.), *The Beautiful Adulteress* (price 6d.), and *The Trial of R— L—, for Criminal Conversation with the Late Lady A—* (price 6d.).⁴⁴ *The Amorous Dutchess* and *The Beautiful Adulteress* were probably new editions or abridgements of *The Unfortunate Dutchess; or, The Lucky Gamester* by David Craufurd/Crawfurd (1700, 1739, 1744) and *The Fair Adulteress* (1744), respectively. The account of Richard Lyddel's trial for adultery with Lady Abergavenny, which survives as a 24-page pamphlet, reprised material from 1730. On the other hand, *The Fortunate Beauty* has no currently identified precedent. The three novels *The Cruel Father*, *The History of Clerimont*, and *The History of Cordelia* (which were issued together in a 32-page chapbook) had been included in an anthology of thirteen novels, 'none of which were ever printed before', published under the title of *The Theatre of Love* by William Reeve in 1759, and priced at 3s. bound.⁴⁵ Aphra Behn's *The Fair Jilt*, published

43 David Atkinson, 'Street Literature Printing in Stonecutter Street (1740s–1780s)', *Publishing History*, 78 (2018), 9–53.

44 *Public Advertiser*, 15 July 1757, p. 4.

45 *The Theatre of Love: A Collection of Novels (None of Which Were Ever Printed Before)* (London: printed and sold by W. Reeve, at Shakespear's Head, opposite Crane Court, Fleet Street, 1759) [ESTC T66917]. The names of W. Reeve, C. Sympson, and M. Cooper appear together in a number of imprints from the time when Sympson was located in Chancery Lane in the 1750s.

as a 36-page quarto, was probably the first free-standing edition since 1688. Some other titles may have been newly written, although it is still very difficult to be confident in this regard. *The Fair Jilt* and *The History of the Unfortunate Isabella* cost only 3d., so perhaps the titles priced at 1s. and advertised in the newspaper were pitched at a more fashionable readership (the 1739 and 1744 editions of Crawford's *Unfortunate Dutchess* were also priced at 1s.).

Some of the titles were published jointly by C. Sympson and J. Miller. Not much is known about Miller, but he was in Southwark from the mid-1750s and during the 1760s, then in Goodman's Fields in the 1770s, and in Rosemary Lane c.1779–85.⁴⁶ He is not known to have printed ballads or chapbook histories, but surviving publications include song chapbooks, criminal lives, religious, domestic, and instructional works, and some short fiction. Once again, there are imprints for Miller advertising jobbing printing, and also a surviving trade card printed by Miller. Sympson and Miller collaborated on the unabridged edition of *Moll Flanders*, but this looks to have been an unusual venture, for Miller in particular. Another edition of one of Miller's titles, *The History of the Unfortunate Sisters*, was published by J. How in Long Acre in 1756.⁴⁷ While it is impossible to determine precedence, the opening sentence does make more immediate sense in Miller than in How because it follows on from the summary on the title page, which is not there in How's edition. *The Shepherdess of the Alps* was one of Jean-François Marmontel's *Contes moraux*, which appeared in English translation in 1764–66 and was published in magazines and by various booksellers after that date. *The History of the Beautiful Miss Fermia* was also published by Thomas Sabine, perhaps around the same time as Miller. On the other hand, Miller's is the only recorded edition of *The Village Beauty*, and the one further recorded edition of *Abdallah and Zoraide* (from an

46 Miller issued editions of *The British Jewel; or, Complete Housewife's Best Companion* from all three addresses, making it fairly certain that this was the same person. Imprints invariably have the name as J. Miller, but an insurance policy for John Miller in Rosemary Lane in 1778 is recorded in Exeter Working Papers in British Book Trade History, 8: *The British Book Trades, 1775–1787 — An Index to Insurance Policies* <https://bookhistory.blogspot.com/2007/01/insurance-names-m-q.html>.

47 *The Unfortunate Sisters; or, The Distress'd Ladies* (London: printed and sold by J. How, in Long Acre, 1756) [ESTC T67649]. (ESTC T165618, currently listed as a 1701 edition, is an error for 1781.)

elusive bookseller called John Smith) is watermarked 1794, and most probably later than Miller's edition.

Appended to *Abdallah and Zoraide* is a list of books printed and sold by J. Miller in Rosemary Lane, which includes something called *The Entertaining Medley* which offered the reader five books that would have cost 3d. each if bought separately for just 1s., making an overall saving of 3d.⁴⁸ The titles are *Fun for the Kitchen* (a jest-book), *The Complete Valentine Writer*, and *The History of the Unfortunate Sisters, The Shepherd and Shepherdess of the Alps*, and *The Village Beauty; or, Injured Innocence*. This means that *The History of the Unfortunate Sisters* — printed in Southwark in the 1750s/60s — was still available during the Rosemary Lane years, in the 1780s. It also largely confirms that Miller's short fiction titles sold at a standard price of 3d.

Thomas Sabine and Son (c.1775–1820s)

By the last couple of decades of the century the number of booksellers issuing cheap fiction of the kind under discussion so far was expanding considerably, so it will be possible only to consider some representative examples from this period. One important one is the bookselling and printing firm begun by Thomas Sabine in Shoe Lane, Fleet Street.⁴⁹ Sabine had been an apprentice of Thomas Bailey in Leadenhall Street and became free of the Stationers' Company in 1765.⁵⁰ Although he is not known to have started in business in Shoe Lane before c.1775, he became a liveryman of the Stationers' Company in 1780.⁵¹ Around the end of the century, Thomas Sabine was in partnership with his son, and after his death in 1810, Thomas (the younger) continued the business into the 1820s.

The firm mainly published old chapbook histories, instructional works, topical pamphlets, playbooks, a few theological works, and

48 A half-title page that reads 'The Entertaining Medley, Which is Serious, Diverting and Merry. Price One Shilling' may have belonged to this selection but is now bound into a volume containing a mixture of Bailey and Sympson short fiction, with the spine labelled *The Entertaining Medley* (London, British Library, Cup.407.n.16.).

49 David Atkinson, 'Thomas Sabine and Son: Street Literature and Cheap Print at the End of the Eighteenth Century', in *A Notorious Chaunter in B Flat and Other Characters in Street Literature*, ed. David Atkinson and Steve Roud (London: Ballad Partners, 2022), pp. 161–85.

50 *Stationers' Company Apprentices, 1701–1800*, pp. 13 (no. 280).

51 *Stationers' Company Apprentices, 1701–1800*, pp. 304, 429 (3 October 1780).

a substantial volume of cheap fiction. Their publications were mostly priced around 6*d.* and occasionally up to 1*s.*, but rarely more. Their printed booksellers' lists tend not to give a price for the long-standing chapbook titles, but at one time they advertised a large assortment of 'penny histories' at 3*s.* per hundred wholesale, suggesting they might have been sold for 1*d.* retail.⁵² It is reasonable to assume that these were 24-page chapbooks, of which only a few survive with a Sabine imprint. Older titles in this format include *Dreams and Moles*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Cinderella*, *Tom Long*, *Mother Bunch of the West*, *The King and the Cobbler*, and *Jane Shore*. Some of the firm's imprints also advertised jobbing printing (they printed annual sheets for distribution by parish lamplighters), and newspaper advertisements show they dealt in patent medicines.

It was evidently a successful business and a large number of their publications survive, including versions of *Moll Flanders* and *Robinson Crusoe*.⁵³ There was also a short adaptation from Goethe called *Werter and Charlotte*.⁵⁴ Around fifty cheap fiction titles can be identified, including a few different editions of the same works, mostly in the region of thirty-two to sixty-four pages, priced at 6*d.* As with the earlier booksellers, there are even more individual stories because some books contain more than one story. Dating is difficult, but the output may have extended over as much as four decades.

Besides venerable titles like Aphra Behn's *The Fair Jilt* and Eliza Haywood's *The Distress'd Orphan*,⁵⁵ the firm reprinted the histories of *Betty Ireland*, *Henrietta de Bellgrave*, and *Zoa and Rodomond*. This was (so far as is known) the first cheap fiction edition of *Zoa and Rodomond* and it ends with the voice of the bookseller:

52 Bookseller's list in *Robin Hood's Garland* (London: printed and sold by T. Sabine, No. 81, Shoe Lane, Fleet Street; where printing is expeditiously performed in all its various branches of letter-press and copper-plate on the most reasonable terms) [ESTC T60859].

53 *The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders* (London: printed by T. Sabine, No. 81, Shoe Lane, Fleet Street), price 6*d.* [ESTC N31964]; *The Wonderful Life and Most Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner* (London: printed by T. Sabine, No. 81, Shoe Lane, near Fleet Street) [ESTC N507430].

54 *Werter and Charlotte, a German Story [+ Virtue Rewarded, a Russian Tale + The Advantages of a Single Life]* (London: printed and sold by T. Sabine, No. 81, Shoe Lane) [ESTC T57373] (London, British Library, 12611.ee.32.(4.) with a manuscript date of 30 May 1789).

55 For Sabine's versions of *The Distress'd Orphan*, see further Patrick Spedding, *A Bibliography of Eliza Haywood* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016 [2004]).

In the history of that lady who brought Zoa into the world, there are circumstances no less interesting than in the life of Zoa herself. The various accidents, and at last the severe necessity which compelled her to become the wife of a man, of a complexion, religion, and manners so different from those of her own country, will, I doubt not, excite the compassion of all who read it; and in that confidence I shall here end the story of Zoa; as more particulars are related concerning her in the life of her mother, Henrietta de Bellgrave, which is just published, price only Sixpence. (p. 29)

Sabine also published an edition of the anthology comprising *The Cruel Father*, *The History of Clerimont*, and *The History of Cordelia*, which had previously been published by Sympson and Miller. Sabine's *The Forc'd Marriage of Miss Betsey Ward* is a variant text of Bailey's *The Forc'd Marriage of Miss Betsey Mason*, which has different names for the characters but otherwise follows the text closely until some additional pages at the end elaborate on the downfall of the heroine's treacherous cousin. *The History and Adventures of Julia, the Curate's Daughter of Elmwood*, published by Sabine and Son, had already appeared in several magazines.⁵⁶

On the other hand, several titles do not have obvious precedents and may well have been newly written in the decades around the end of the century to supply a growing market for cheap fiction. Some of them may even have been written specifically for the Sabine firm, but some were issued by other booksellers as well, around the same time, and it is more or less impossible to determine precedence. Nonetheless, it will be profitable briefly to consider a few of the putative connections within the cheap fiction trade.

Andrew Hambleton, James Sadler, Alice Swindells, Susannah Martin (1780s–1790s)

One bookseller whose surviving output overlaps significantly with that of the Sabine firm was Andrew Hambleton, of whom little is known except that, from imprint evidence, he was in business in London during the 1780s/90s. A majority of his surviving publications are short

⁵⁶ Robert D. Mayo, *The English Novel in the Magazines, 1740–1815, with a Catalogue of 1375 Magazine Novels and Novelettes* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press; London: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 537.

fiction, with prices given as 4*d.* or 6*d.* Out of ten titles, seven — *Betsey Warwick*, *Maria Farrell*, *Mary Ann Edwards*, *Arabella Euston and Francis Philemon*, *Thomas Beaumont and Lucia Bannister*, *Lucy Banks*, *The Stolen Marriages* — were also published by Sabine.

Betsey Warwick, the *Female Rambler* was, apparently, adapted from an earlier novel called *The Female Rambler*, published by William Reeve, which was itself ostensibly founded on a French model.⁵⁷ Besides three editions from Sabine and one from Hambleton, there were another three associated with the name of James Sadler, who appears in some imprints in collaboration with W. or M. (Mary) Clements and J. (John) Eves, mostly in the 1790s. This was a group of booksellers about whom little is known, but their publications are comparable with Sabine's: old chapbook titles, songbooks, domestic and instructional works, travels, cheap fiction. Among their other titles were *Henrietta de Bellgrave*, *Zoa and Rodomond*, *Fanny Adams and Lord Whatley* (previously published by Bailey), priced at 6*d.*, and *The Shepherdess of the Alps*, priced at 3*d.*

There is a further complication here in that Sadler, Clements, and Eves were London booksellers, but some of their titles were printed not in London but either by Alice Swindells in Manchester or by Susannah Martin in Birmingham. In Manchester the Swindells firm, where Alice succeeded her husband George on his death in 1796, specialized in street literature, printing ballads and chapbooks, and Alice printed titles that were sold by Sadler, Clements, and Eves, and also by J. Sadler, and an unidentified T. Thomas. The layout of some of the Swindells/Sadler imprints gives the appearance of privileging Manchester as the place of publication. Similarly, Susannah Martin in Birmingham succeeded her husband Robert, who also died in 1796, and printed *Henrietta de Bellgrave* and *Zoa and Rodomond* for James Sadler. During Robert Martin's lifetime the firm was associated with religious and other non-fiction titles, but in the first decade of the new century Susannah and their son Thomas also published street literature titles under the imprint of S. & T. Martin. Again, the Martin/Sadler imprints give prominence to Birmingham as the place of publication.

⁵⁷ *The Female Rambler, being the Adventures of Madem. Janeton De ******, taken from the French (London: printed for W. Reeve, at Shakespear's Head, Fleet Street, 1754), price 2*s.* bound [ESTC N8772].

These connections suggest some joining up of the cheap print trade across different urban centres, with London booksellers apparently having their printing done in Manchester or Birmingham, and it would be surprising if the titles in question were not also sold there. When the partnership of Martin & Hunter issued an edition of *Betsey Warwick*, probably c.1810, it was unequivocally a Birmingham publication.⁵⁸

After the turn of the century

Several of the cheap fiction titles of the eighteenth century continued to be published in the nineteenth. Library catalogues show, for example, editions of *Henrietta de Bellgrave* and/or *Zoa and Rodomond* published by J. Bailey, S. Fisher, T. Hughes, Dean and Munday, Hodgson and Co. (all London), J. Sadler (London, but printed in Birmingham), T. Brandard (Birmingham), Thomas Richardson (Derby), George Walker (Durham), G. Wilson (Leeds), Heming and Tallis (Stourbridge), J. Kendrew (York). These were booksellers who published a range of material, some of which would readily fall under the heading of chapbook gothic.⁵⁹ Simon Fisher, for example, published novels with titles like *The True and Affecting History of the Duchess of C****, Who Was Confined by her Husband in a Dismal Dungeon* (1799), *The History of Emma; or, The Victim of Depravity* (1800), *The Gothic Story of Courville Castle; or, The Illegitimate Son* (1801), all priced at 6d. Equally, though, some of the same booksellers continued to issue venerable street literature titles, although in some instances the stories had been rewritten since they first appeared. Dean and Munday published many titles (including books for children) during the period c.1814–42, among which were versions of *Jane Shore*, *Fair Rosamond*, *George Barnwell*, *Doctor Faustus*, *Robin Hood*, *Mother Shipton*, *Nixon's Prophecies*, the *Norwood Gypsy*, and so on, priced at 6d. each and advertised on the coloured paper wrappers of the firm's editions of *Henrietta de Bellgrave* and *Zoa and Rodomond* (also priced

58 *The Astonishing History and Adventures of Betsey Warwick, the Female Rambler* (Birmingham: printed by Martin & Hunter, Haymarket), price 9d. [London, British Library, 1570/3973].

59 Kelly, 'Fiction and the Working Classes', pp. 222–24, for example, details the range of J. Bailey's output under three broad headings: entertaining chapbooks, instructional chapbooks, and reform-oriented chapbooks. The term 'chapbook gothic' is used by St Clair, *Reading Nation*, p. 349.

at 6d.).⁶⁰ J. Bailey published *Fair Rosamond* and *Jane Shore* together in 1809. Hodgson and Co., Thomas Richardson, and Heming and Tallis all published editions of *Fair Rosamond*. The Kendrew firm in York, which was in business c.1803–48 and printed a multitude of slip songs and chapbooks, published both *Jane Shore* and *The Shepherdess of the Alps* in 24-page chapbooks of similar physical appearance, both dated c.1810 in the British Library catalogue.⁶¹ Later, a Kendrew catalogue from c.1820 listed *The History of Henrietta of Belgrave* [sic], *The History of Zoa, the Beautiful Indian*, and other cheap fiction titles alongside *The Affecting History of Fair Rosamond*, *The Affecting History of Jane Shore*, and other familiar chapbook titles, all priced at 6d.⁶²

The durability of the 6d. pricing over such a long period, into the new century, is remarkable. There are only slight signs of inflation, such as the Martin/Sadler copy of *Zoa and Rodomond* where the printed price of 6d. has been scratched out and 9d. written in. Later, the Martin & Hunter edition of *Betsey Warwick* has a printed price of 9d. on the title page. A further curiosity is that the price has been quite neatly cut out of the title page of the British Library copy of Sabine's *The Forc'd Marriage of Miss Betsey Ward*, while the Bodleian Library copy still has the 6d. price.⁶³ The Kendrew catalogue does have other books priced at 1s. or 1s. 6d. (*The Merry History of Robin Hood*, with twenty-eight engravings, costing 1s., is one example), but within a context of general inflation the price of cheap fiction was, on the face of it, quite stable and steadily reducing in real terms, although affordability no doubt remained a highly subjective measure.

60 *The True and Affecting History of Henrietta of Bellgrave* (London: printed and sold by Dean and Munday, Threadneedle Street), price 6d. [London, British Library, 12612.b.3.]; *The True History of Zoa, the Beautiful Indian (Daughter of Henrietta de Bellgrave) and of Rodomond [...]* to which is added, *The Affecting History of Lisette and Login, a Russian Tale* (London: printed and sold by Dean & Munday, Threadneedle Street), price 6d. [London, British Library, 12612.b.1.].

61 *The Life and Death of Mrs. Jane Shore, Concubine to Edward IVth.* (York: printed and sold by J. Kendrew, Colliergate) [London, British Library, 74/1870.c.2.(577.)]; *The Shepherdess of the Alps, a Very Interesting, Pathetic, and Moral Tale*, published by request (J. Kendrew, printer, Colliergate, York) [London, British Library, 74/1870.c.2.(578.)].

62 *A Catalogue of Books, Moral, Useful, and Entertaining, with Engravings, Printed and Sold by J. Kendrew, Colliergate, York* [London, British Library, 74/1870.c.2.(1.)].

63 London, British Library, 1508/1519; Oxford, Bodleian Library, Harding A 204 (1).

Continuity and ownership

The difficulty of dating individual volumes is a persistent problem in charting the succession of booksellers publishing the same works, although some are clearly earlier or later than others. Madeleine Blondel, addressing eighteenth-century fiction at large, maintained that booksellers 'did not scruple to reprint a book and give it a different title, or simply to change the cover and the title page to give it a new name, so that people might imagine they were reading something new'.⁶⁴ As an illustration, she traced successive editions of *Henrietta de Bellgrave* and *Zoa and Rodomond* after *The Lady's Drawing Room*.⁶⁵ These include a publication titled *Memoirs of Lydia Tongue-Pad and Juliana Clack-It*, issued under two separate (fictitious?) imprints and undated but reviewed in periodicals of 1768, which is substantially a copy of parts of *The Lady's Drawing Room* with the characters' names changed (Henrietta to Mariamne, Zoa to Amelia).⁶⁶ However, all the free-standing cheap editions of *Henrietta de Bellgrave* retain the names as in *The Lady's Drawing Room*, which must mean that they descend from that publication. Instances of changes to titles and names, such as Bailey's *Forc'd Marriage of Miss Betsey Mason* published again by Sabine as the *Forc'd Marriage of Miss Betsey Ward*, might actually be the exception to prove the rule. While Blondel may be correct in some instances, titles like *Henrietta de Bellgrave* and *Zoa and Rodomond* hardly support her observation that 'there exist different degrees of villainy in these deceptions, and ingenious methods are found to conceal them'.⁶⁷

Shortly after Blondel's article appeared, E. W. Pitcher took issue with what he read as her implication that 'virtually every reprinting of an old work was a conscious pirating or evidence of a deliberate attempt

64 Blondel, 'Eighteenth-Century Novels Transformed', p. 529.

65 Blondel, 'Eighteenth-Century Novels Transformed', pp. 529–34.

66 'The Distress'd Virgin, Unhappy Wife, and Most Afflicted Mother, Addressed to her Daughter', in *Memoirs of Lydia Tongue-Pad and Juliana Clack-It* (London: printed for M. Thrush, in Salisbury Court, Fleet Street) [ESTC T70097] (London: printed for J. Coote, at No. 16, in Paternoster Row) [ESTC N21981], pp. 109–264.

67 Blondel, 'Eighteenth-Century Novels Transformed', p. 529; also, 'we can draw attention to the marked commercial sense of printers and booksellers who neglect no opportunity and refuse no expedient which will enable them to attract customers by the lure of novelty' (p. 540).

to disguise something old as something new'.⁶⁸ Even so, Pitcher's own interpretation of the possible relationships among booksellers ranged widely, from accusations of theft and piracy, to 'open collaboration', 'complete ignorance of the source of a story', '*laissez-faire* marketing', 'contractual relationships', 'a common storehouse of material', and 'firms such as that of Dean and Munday were not so much "pirates" as beachcombers who reprinted whatever flotsam came to hand without much consideration of by what obscure currents the material had come their way'.⁶⁹ The dispute demonstrates, if nothing else, the difficulty of applying conventional notions of ownership to the cheap end of the eighteenth-century book trade.

In principle, under the terms of the copyright act of 1710, property rights in a new title were protected for fourteen years, renewable for another fourteen if the author were still living, so long as the title in question had been entered in the Stationers' Register (8 Anne c. 19). In 1814, this was extended to twenty-eight years, and for the remainder of the author's life if still living (54 George III c. 156). Some of the cheap fiction titles fall within what St Clair calls the 'high monopoly period', during which the major London booksellers maintained a *de facto* claim to perpetual copyright in works they published, from 1710 up until the ruling in the *Donaldson v. Becket* case in 1774.⁷⁰ Even so, the significance of that ruling is not entirely straightforward. James Raven, for example, sees it less as a watershed than as a point in a much longer course of development, with on the one hand cheap reprinting flourishing over several decades prior to 1774, and on the other leading booksellers' *de facto* copyright extending well beyond that date.⁷¹ Much of the evidence around perpetual copyright concerns valuable literary works, such as Gay's *Polly* and Thomson's *The Seasons*, and the competition to the London trade from Scottish and Irish booksellers. Those are things

68 Pitcher, 'Pirates and Publishers Reconsidered', p. 76.

69 Pitcher, 'Pirates and Publishers Reconsidered', p. 77, 79–80.

70 St Clair, *Reading Nation*, chapter 5.

71 James Raven, *The Business of Books: Booksellers and the English Book Trade, 1450–1850* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007), pp. 128, 230–38 (esp. p. 232).

that have little immediate relevance to either street literature or cheap fiction.⁷²

The authority of the Stationers' Company itself was waning during the eighteenth century.⁷³ After 1712, street literature titles in the form of ballads and chapbooks were no longer being entered in the Stationers' Register (the exceptions being some topical pamphlets and Cheap Repository publications), and different booksellers began publishing the same titles in different parts of the country. Neither, to date, have I found any traces in the Stationers' Register of the cheap fiction titles discussed here (albeit there is no systematic way of checking). The exception to prove the rule comes in the form of the more valuable title, *The Lady's Drawing Room*, printed and sold by M. Cooper and A. Dodd, which was priced at 3s. and was entered in the Register to Mary Cooper on 31 October 1743. If anyone was paying attention, that would have provided copyright protection until 1757, so it is conceivable that Bailey's edition of *Henrietta de Bellgrave* did not actually constitute an infringement.⁷⁴

Instead of a legalistic understanding of copyright law, John Feather argues that just as important were 'customs of the trade', sometimes called 'honorary copyright', whereby there was an unwritten agreement not to reprint works already published by others.⁷⁵ Certainly, one can imagine that the profit margins on cheap fiction retailing at 6*d.* were sufficiently tight to discourage unfettered competition. Any effective restrictions, however, would depend on the size of the potential market at any particular time, and the sheer volume of titles recorded

72 Cf. Michael Harris, 'Paper Pirates: The Alternative Book Trade in Mid-18th Century London', in *Fakes and Frauds: Varieties of Deception in Print and Manuscript*, ed. Robin Myers and Michael Harris (Winchester: St Paul's Bibliographies, 1989), pp. 47–69.

73 Michael Treadwell, 'The Stationers and the Printing Acts at the End of the Seventeenth Century', in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, vol. 4, 1557–1695, ed. John Barnard and D. F. McKenzie, with Maureen Bell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 755–76 (esp. pp. 770–76).

74 I have not found any additional entry for the second edition of 1748 (printed for A. Millar and sold by M. Cooper). Since *The Lady's Drawing Room* was not attributed to a named author it is impossible to know what, if anything, happened after fourteen years had passed. Mary Cooper died in 1761.

75 John Feather, 'The Significance of Copyright History for Publishing History and Historians', in *Privilege and Property: Essays on the History of Copyright*, ed. Ronan Deazley, Martin Kretschmer, and Lionel Bently (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2010), pp. 359–67 (p. 365).

from the turn of the century onwards certainly indicates that it was growing. The appearance of the same titles from different booksellers suggests direct competition, while the evidence of London, Manchester, and Birmingham bookseller/printers working together points to an alternative model of cooperation or co-publishing. In addition, the multiple booksellers named in some imprints implies contractual relationships for distribution.⁷⁶

Changing reading habits

Cheap amatory fiction had coexisted with traditional street literature at least since the short novels of Aphra Behn and Eliza Haywood first appeared. What this account has endeavoured to show is that by the mid-century there were certain booksellers who were publishing cheap fiction alongside chapbook histories, criminals' lives, and the like. The pattern, moreover, continued into the early decades of the next century, although by that time there were more booksellers who were associated specifically with the market for cheap fiction. The standard accounts rightly record the increase in cheap fiction titles and the decline in the legendary and historical tales of the older chapbooks, at least in proportion to the newer titles, but St Clair's interpretation of a 'sudden mass extinction' is certainly an exaggeration.⁷⁷

Instead, the coexistence of what are, on the face of it, rather different literary genres does raise the question whether the price differential between 24-page chapbooks priced at 1*d.* or so and cheap fiction priced at 6*d.* — that is, six times the price — points to different target markets. Sabine's *Robin Hood's Garland*, which includes the advertisement for

76 Pitcher, 'Pirates and Publishers Reconsidered', p. 80, citing as an example: *The Nun; or, Memoirs of Angelique, an Interesting Tale; also The Adventures of Henry de Montmorency, a Tale; to which is added, The Surprising Life of Mrs. Dholson* (London: printed for Tegg and Castelman, Eccentric Book Warehouse, No. 122, St John's Street, West Smithfield; Champante and Whitrow, Aldgate; T. Hughes, Paternoster Row; Willmot and Hill, Borough; N. Rollason, Coventry; J. Belcher, Birmingham; B. Sellick, Bristol; T. Troughton, Liverpool; J. Mitchell, Newcastle; T. Brown, North Street, Edinburgh; E. Peck, Lower Ousegate, York; T. Binns, Leeds; J. Dingle, Bury St Edmunds; T. Brown, Bath; B. Dugdale, Dublin; M. Swindels [*sic*], Manchester; J. Raw and J. Bush, Ipswich; J. Booth, Norwich; Collins and Fellows, Salisbury; and G. Wilkins, Derby; T. Plummer, printer, Seething Lane) [London, British Library, 012611.e.6.(5.)].

77 St Clair, *Reading Nation*, p. 350.

'penny histories' as 3s. per hundred, is itself listed at 6d., alongside titles such as *The Perjured Lover*, *The Unfortunate Happy Lady*, *The Distress'd Orphan*, *Betsey Warwick*, *The Fair Jilt*, *Betsey Ward*, *Charlotte Lorrain*, and *The History of the Unfortunate Lovers*, as well as (an abridged) *Robinson Crusoe*. Materially, there is not a great deal to distinguish the different literary genres. *Robin Hood's Garland* is a duodecimo of ninety-six pages, the cheap fiction titles mostly octavos of around sixty-four pages. The older titles do, however, tend to be more extensively illustrated with woodcuts, whereas the cheap fiction titles have to make do with an engraved frontispiece.

It is also the case that during the eighteenth century the old legendary histories were being published not only in 24-page chapbook format (most notably from Bow Churchyard and Aldermary Churchyard), but also in longer, textually distinct and more demanding versions. Sabine, for example, published two different duodecimo editions of *Guy of Warwick* (confusingly with the same edition statement, even though they are clearly different settings of type), of 144 and 108 pages.⁷⁸ The title is listed at 6d. in more than one of the firm's printed lists; unfortunately, it is unknown whether it was ever also issued as one of the 'penny histories' in 24-page format. The appearance of cheap chapbook editions of romances like *Guy of Warwick* is thought to represent an extension and diversification of readership during the second half of the century — including among children — equated with different economic resources, social horizons, and reading abilities and expectations.⁷⁹

The Children in the Wood, on the other hand, appears in the Sabine firm's printed lists both as a title priced at 6d. and as one among several 'histories' (for which no price is indicated but which, surviving copies seem to indicate, were 24-page chapbooks or 'penny histories').⁸⁰ *The Children in the Wood* does not survive in that format, but it is extant as

78 *The Noble and Renowned History of Guy, Earl of Warwick*, 12th edn (London: printed by T. Sabine, No. 81, Shoe Lane) [ESTC T135121] (144 pp.); *The History of Guy, Earl of Warwick* [+ *The Tragical Story of Polidor and Livia*], 12th edn (London: printed by T. Sabine and Son, 81, Shoe Lane, Fleet Street) [ESTC T135122] (108 pp.).

79 For example: Lori Humphrey Newcomb, *Reading Popular Romance in Early Modern England* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

80 For example, 'catalogue of histories' in *The History of Mother Bunch of the West* [...] *Part the Second* (printed and sold at the London and Middlesex Printing Office, No. 81, Shoe Lane, Holborn) [ESTC T36430], itself a 24-page chapbook.

a long duodecimo of 108 pages, which includes two other stories, and which is presumably the publication listed at 6*d.*⁸¹ The prose story and ballad version of *The Children in the Wood* occupy the first half of the book, followed by twenty-four pages of Sir Richard Whittington and his Cat, and twenty-six pages of the story of Amurath. This last is an exotic and somewhat fantastical tale of an Eastern monarch, not without its moral, but at quite a remove from the familiarity of *The Children in the Wood* and Dick Whittington, and in consequence seemingly rather more demanding of the reader. The copy of the Sabine volume in the British Library retains its original blue wrappers, and on the recto of the frontispiece is written 'Wilmot Whatley & Jane', and on the verso of the title page 'Jane and Wilmot Whalley book' — one would dearly like to be able to identify these owners.⁸²

Price and extent need not necessarily equate in an entirely straightforward way with literary sophistication. Several of the cheap fiction titles include more than one story, so each one is not necessarily very long or complicated. It may be that works priced at 6*d.* were becoming more affordable; that with gradually rising literacy, readers were wanting more for their money; and that their literary horizons were also expanding. These are likely factors encouraging booksellers to decide just where to position themselves in the market. Changing reading habits, which are in any case difficult to document at the cheap end of the trade, are beyond the scope of this chapter, but the evidence presented here does show that some of the booksellers specializing in street literature were apparently responding to such developments — evidence of a trade evolution to match the genre evolution that other scholars (Lennard Davis, Gary Kelly) have noted.

81 *The History of the Children in the Wood* [...] to which is added, *The History of Sir R. Whittington and his Cat* [+ *The Story of Amurath, an Eastern Monarch*] (London: printed by T. Sabine, 81, Shoe Lane, Fleet Street) [ESTC T506192]. 108 pp.

82 London, British Library, RB.23.a.38187 (the discrepancy with regard to the surname is apparent, but presumably accidental).

